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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Note verbale dated 13 October 1997 from the Permanent Mission of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of the State of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its complements to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to documents E/CN.4/1997/NGO/58 dated 17 March 1997 and E/CN.4/1997/NGO/88 dated 1 April 1997 containing written statements from two non-governmental organizations and which allege infringements of human rights in the State of Bahrain.

The Permanent Mission would like to state that whilst the Government of the State of Bahrain fully respects the principles and motives upon which Human Rights Watch and - whose statements are under response - are founded, it must declare that their views on the human rights situation in Bahrain are, sadly, neither objective nor impartial. Their statements do not reflect, nor address, the realities of the situation in Bahrain today but are in fact based on information and allegations that are neither credible nor accurate. The Government has gone to great lengths to try and explain the true situation in Bahrain and the nature and source of the allegations directed against it by certain extremist elements, mainly outside Bahrain. Much of the material upon which these statements under response are founded originates from such elements who have little knowledge of the situation in Bahrain. They are not credible sources, have no bona fide interest in human rights but, instead, have their own agendas.

Bahrain has consistently made it clear to the international community and especially the Commission on Human Rights, that the events and activities which it has to deal with in Bahrain are terrorist related. The allegations of human rights abuses are directed from propagandists with close ties to terrorist organizations.

The situation in Bahrain is normal and the Government is, of course, well aware of the underlying social and economic issues that prevail, not just in Bahrain but in the region as a whole. The Government has made strenuous efforts to address these issues in a positive and even-handed manner. The statements of Human Rights Watch and FIDH fail to make any mention of this nor of the fact that Bahrain is a peaceful, progressive, tolerant and diverse society. Foreign expatriates work in numerous fields alongside Bahrainis and Bahrain provides a unique social environment where individuals are free to practise their religion and rituals without fear of discrimination, persecution of interference. Such religious tolerance is recognized internationally and the Government refers to the acknowledgement of this in the United States State Department Report on Religious Freedom. Contrary to what is alleged in the statements under response, Bahraini citizens participate in the running of the country and enjoy a continually developing system of government; a system that is one of consensus, not confrontation. This includes direct personal access to the country's leaders on essential issues either through the Consultative (Shura) Council, the media or through other traditional and established institutions as befits the country's Islamic and cultural particulars.

Bahrain is proud too of the social provision which it makes for its citizens - with free education and health care for all. Bahrain has become a financial, industrial, commercial, tourism and international conference centre with a worldwide reputation. All of these are achievements and systems which the Government and people of Bahrain are not prepared to see destroyed, and which must not be allowed to be destroyed, by terrorism.

Bahrain has focused heavily on its economic and social development, so as to create a modern society able to provide a good standard of living and opportunities for its peoples. According to the United Nations Developing Programme Human Development Report 1997, Bahrain ranked forty-third of all countries and also, for the third consecutive year, first in the Arab World for its achievements in development.

Throughout the troubles, the Government has dealt with the situation through its regular police force together with the rule of law in an entirely fair, sensitive and proper manner, balancing the requirements of public order and individual rights. All persons arrested in connection with the disturbances have been detained in accordance with the law for violence or terrorist-related offences. Issues of detention, trial and release are determined independently by due process of law without discrimination and in compliance with the United Nations principles regarding fair trial and treatment of prisoners.

The Government's active commitment to human issues has been demonstrated by the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The agreement reflects the long-standing

relationship of consultation and cooperation which exists between the two parties, and includes standard ICRC terms under which the ICRC is conducting visits to prisoners in Bahrain with the Government's full and unqualified cooperation.

Bahrain's good and positive record on human rights is well known to all countries an Bahrain has consistently cooperated with the Commission and the Centre for Human Rights to raise concerns internationally regarding human rights. The Government remains absolutely committed to the protection of individual freedoms and rights for all its citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or origin. In doing so, the Government fully recognizes its responsibilities to uphold these fundamental rights in accordance with international standards and principles, including the United Nations Charters and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Government of Bahrain, therefore, urges the Commission on Human Rights to take into account the above and stand with Bahrain in its fight to eliminate terrorism and promote human rights in order to achieve peace and security, which are so valued and cherished by both the Bahraini people and the international community.

The Permanent Mission would be grateful if the Secretary-General could include this note as an official document of the work of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session under agenda item 10.